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ABSTRACT

This statement urges the nation's colleges and universities to adopt open admissions policies and to direct both private and public funds into creating opportunities whereby any person who has completed requirements for graduation from an accredited high school or its equivalent will be assured access to higher education. Though minority group enrollment has increased 85 percent over the last 5 years, it has only reached 6 percent of the total enrollment. In past years, admission criteria were frequently dictated by factors having little to do with a student's potential success and it has now been demonstrated that traditional admission criteria predict little or nothing about what a given student will do in college or about his potential after graduation. The best way to determine whether a student is capable of college work is to evaluate his performance in college. The major attack on open admissions is being conducted in the name of an alleged threat to academic standards, but academic excellence has all too often been an exercise of the privileged to assure that they remain privileged by keeping access to the top restricted. Academic standards should be measured by how well the graduate is prepared to find employment which fulfills his needs, and how well he is equipped to progress in society. In addition to open admissions, supportive and remedial services are also essential to provide equal opportunity. (AF)

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STATEMENT of THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES,
NATIONAL URBAN LEAGUE
ON OPEN ADMISSIONS IN
AMERICAN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

FEB 1970

The National Urban League asserts that our nation's colleges and universities must adopt or re-establish policies of open admission and direct both public and private funds into creating opportunities whereby any person who has completed requirements for graduation from an accredited high school or its equivalent will be assured access to higher education. Open admission policies have been the heritage of our land-grant colleges and more recently have been reflected in the policies of our state colleges in the midwest, the vast network of junior colleges and regional colleges.

Minority group enrollment in America's institutions of higher learning, while having increased 85 percent in the past five years, has only reached six percent of total enrollment. Given the social stakes involved, in and out of our urban centers, this nation's colleges and universities must take a clear social position, accepting the public responsibility for short-circuiting the cycle of disappointment, discrimination and rage that locks minority youth out of productive careers and robs them of a stake in society.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
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We are not unmindful of the problems involved in establishing or re-establishing open admissions and the controversies raging over a variety of issues and alleged issues. High among them are strident debates over revised admissions procedures, fear for the preservation of academic standards, predictions of a high attrition rate, devaluation of degree, and the availability of money for expanded facilities and necessary supportive services. Nonetheless, we feel sure that given a clear understanding of today's social imperatives and a clear recognition of the exclusionary policies of most of our colleges and universities, these questions can be and must be resolved in favor of open admissions.

It should be borne in mind that so-called objective criteria in admissions are barely 25 years old in most American universities. To this day, every aspiring high school graduate in some states is assured a place in a freshman class in college. Moreover, the application of criteria is frequently dictated by factors having little to do with a student's potential success. In one major urban university, far from atypical, the cut-off point in high school averages for admission rose from 72 percent in 1924 to 85 percent at the end of the 60's. Such variations are little more than a response to supply and demand, a means of allocating seats in short supply.

Within the pool of rejected students are thousands who would do satisfactory and even outstanding work. If you add to that pool all those from ghetto schools who never apply because they have been told through 12 years of elementary and secondary education that they are not "college material" the social and economic loss is staggering and exclusionary policies must be seen as intolerable in terms of social and human costs.

Moreover, it has been clearly demonstrated that now traditional terms of admission prediction little or nothing about what a given student will do in colleges or about his potential after he graduates. At the same time, it has been clearly shown that lack of motivation is not a problem where genuine opportunity exists; academic skills can be acquired; and persons once thought uneducable at the college level, based on high school records, college boards and cut-off points are now succeeding in their studies.

Educators do not really know who learns best or under what conditions and most colleges today admit that motivation, emotional maturity, etc., are better yardsticks by which to predict a person's future productivity than present measures of judgment. The best way of determining whether a potential student is capable of college work is to admit him to a college and evaluate his performance there.

Open admissions is no guarantee that every student will meet the standards set for a degree, but there is no such universal success even in a system of selective admissions.

Many black students come to universities with impoverished backgrounds and limited educational experiences despite 12 years of public education, but they bring with them a great many hard-won strengths. They have after all competed successfully in their own environments and against unbelievable odds in the large environment.

The major attack on open admissions however is being conducted in the name of an alleged threat to academic standards, a subject almost as sacred as motherhood. But what is called academic excellence is all too frequently an exercise of the privileged to insure that they remain privileged by the simple expedient of keeping access to the top of the ladder as restricted as possible. Or, contrariwise, the question of academic standards is used to perpetuate the philosophy of those who start with the malicious assumption that black children are not educable and of those whose perceptions of black people generally reflect institutionalized forms of racism.

In the final analysis, academic standards must be measured by how well the graduate is prepared to find employment which will fulfill his needs, how well equipped he is to progress economically and to participate fully and creatively in the society

in which he lives. The student from the ghetto who seeks admission isn't asking for favors or to cheapen the degree. He wants just what every other young person wants. He wants the tools and the opportunity to compete. He needs a college education - the substance of the education as well as a college degree.

Long-range and short-term experience has shown that supportive services are necessary to assure the successful completion of college work by many of the students about whom we are concerned. Experience with black students clearly demonstrates that poor performance in high schools is largely the result of teachers' attitudes and expectations, or boredom and hopelessness, not lack of intelligence and ability. Like other students, black students are responsive to small classes, individual attention, creative programming and remedial work which is obviously relevant. Guidance becomes the key to success with evaluation of the student's qualifications, motivation, interest and potential used as the criteria for placement. A strong, sensitive and adequately staffed counseling program is crucial to the successful implementation of any open enrollment policy.

Admissions alone is only the beginning of the road. Without the other necessary supportive services, open admissions becomes a delusion; the open door becomes a revolving door, ejecting students almost as fast as it admits them. It would be a cruel hoax to admit a student and then render admission meaningless.

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Open admissions will require the expansion of facilities, increase in faculties and administrative staffs and the addition of services. It will be expensive. It will mean discomfort for some, a rearranging of priorities for many and serious pressures on available resources. But it can be done. We expanded college and university facilities quickly in the wake of World War II to accommodate the returning veterans, mainly white; just as through FHA financing we built the suburbs to create jobs and houses to meet additional needs of returning veterans, again predominantly white.

Universal education has long been a national ideal; we must now make the opportunity for universal higher education a national reality. Therefore, the Board of Trustees of the National Urban League unequivocally states its support in behalf of open admissions policies and practices in our nation's colleges and universities.

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